

ABSTRACT OF DISCLOSURE

The invention is a method and apparatus for automatically reading bar code symbols. One aspect of the present invention concerns a method of reading bar code symbols using an automatic hand-holdable bar code symbol reading device. In general, the automatic bar code symbol reading device comprises a hand-holdable housing containing operative elements which provide an object detection field and a scan field each defined external to the housing. The method involves automatically detecting the presence of an object within the object detection field by sensing object sensing energy reflected off the object. In a preferred embodiment, the object sensing energy is IR radiation produced from an object sensing energy source disposed within the housing. In automatic response to the detection of the object within the object detection field, the hand-holdable device detects the presence of a bar code within the scan field using a laser beam produced within the housing. Then, in automatic response to the detection of a bar code in the scan field, the automatic hand-holdable bar code symbol reading device reads the detected bar code in the scan field by producing scan data signals from the detected bar code and thereafter collecting and analyzing the same. Another aspect of the present invention concerns a hand-holdable data collection device adapted for use with the automatic bar code symbol reading device to form a portable symbol reading system characterized by versatility and simplicity of use.